# The Army Officer as Servant

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*The Army exists for one purpose—to serve the Nation. For over 225 years, American Soldiers have answered the Nation's call to duty, faithfully and selflessly performing any mission that the American people have asked of them.*

—The Honorable Thomas E. White and General Eric K. Shinseki[1]

MEN AND WOMEN who become officers in the U.S. Army take an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. After this shared beginning, however, officers' views on what it means to serve as commissioned leaders diverge. Researchers Gayle L. Watkins and Randi C. Cohen, who looked at how officers view themselves, discovered that Army officers do not have a shared conception of the nature of their special expertise or their roles.[2] Two such roles are the officer as a servant of the Nation and the officer as a member of a profession.

## A Servant of the Nation

In January 2000, while serving on the faculty at West Point, I had the opportunity to teach to second-year cadets a military science class called "Perspectives on Officership." The course was organized around four perspectives on officership: the officer as warfighter, the officer as leader of character, the officer as servant of the Nation, and the officer as a member of a time-honored profession. During the readings and discussions on the officer as servant, several cadets surprised me with their negative reactions. One cadet in particular did not want to see himself in this role. To him, being a servant was uninspiring and even demeaning; it took us a while to get past the term "servant" to be sure we were talking about the same thing.

What does it mean for an Army officer to be a servant of the Nation? Fundamentally, this perspective is tied to the manner of appointment of officers and the oath they take upon commissioning. With the advice and the consent of the Senate, the President appoints commissioned officers. Therefore, officers' authority derives from the executive authority of the President. However, as with many powers of the Government, the President and Congress share authority over military affairs. While the U.S. Constitution says that the President shall serve as the Commander in Chief, it also gives Congress the authority to declare war; to raise and support armies; to regulate the Armed Forces; and to provide for "organizing, arming, and disciplining the Militia."[3] Therefore, being a servant of the Nation as an Army officer means serving the American people in the way that elected executive branch and Congressional officials interpret the Nation's interests and values.

This latter point is important to remember. Army officers do serve the Nation, but not based on directly expressed popular preferences. In our representative system of government, elected leaders, not Army officers, are responsible for deciding how the U.S. Army can best serve the American people. If political leaders are wrong or make mistakes, they are accountable only to the other branches of government and ultimately the citizenry. Therefore, being a servant of the Nation requires that Army officers have respect for the democratic institutions of American society and have faith in the democratic process.

For officers to recognize the positive contribution that America's free press makes to democracy is also important. Although relations between the military and the media in the United States have not always been harmonious, Army officers should appreciate that a free press plays a vital role in preserving

the open, democratic political process that officers swear to protect.

So what does being a servant of society *not* mean for an Army officer? It does not mean that Army officers are responsible for interpreting the will of the American people or serving as policy entrepreneurs. Military expertise has a role to play in the formulation of national security policy, but such expertise also has its limits. Important policy choices, both foreign and domestic, are only partially affected by technical considerations and almost always involve tradeoffs in values. Take the example of health-care policy. One relevant question might be whether a particular plan would provide more and better care to those who need it. In other words, will it work? Technical experts should participate in answering this question. A second issue is whether it is of greater value to devote the resources to that plan rather than to some other worthwhile purpose. In other words, does the plan actually respond to the American people's interests and values? This is a question for the Nation's elected leaders.

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Similar issues surround U.S. military intervention abroad. Important questions here relate to whether a particular use of military power will achieve stated objectives, at what level of risk, and at what cost. In sorting through these issues, Army officers have a role to play. However, an equally important question is whether a particular use of military power reflects the American people's interests and values. Only the President and elected leaders in Congress have the responsibility and legitimate authority necessary to make this choice. As military theorist Carl von Clausewitz said, political aims "are the business of the government alone."[4] Military officers have the responsibility to preserve their status as apolitical but loyal junior partners to the Nation's political leadership. Leaders who fulfill their duties in this manner are best situated to serve as constructive contributors to the difficult decisions political leaders must make.

Historically, the Army has been seen as a servant of society, fulfilling the country's needs at different stages in its development. In *The Masks of War,* Carl Builder discusses this reputation and examines the personalities of the U.S. military services and their possible effect on U.S. defense policymaking.[5] Builder argues that of "all the military services, the Army is the most loyal servant and progeny of this nation, of its institutions and people. If the Army worships at an altar, the object worshiped is the country, and the means of worship are service."[6] He points out that when the Army writes about itself, the themes are "the depth of roots in the citizenry, its long and intimate history of service to the nation, and its utter devotion to country."[7] In Builder's assessment, these themes represent deeply held beliefs about what "the Army thinks it is and what it believes in."[8]

In 1989, Builder noted a threat to this longstanding self-identity: "[S]omething happened to the Army in its passage through World War II that it liked," and the Army developed a split personality.[9] Some officers had come to see the Army as the "defender of Europe," with a focus on the high-intensity conflict which that self-image entails. Others in the Army sought to return to the Army's traditional, historical role as the Nation's handyman.[10] Although Builder wrote his book during the last years of the Cold War, his arguments still resonate. Surely it would not be difficult to find in the Army today an officer who would argue that the Army's responsibility to "fight and win the Nation's wars"—with the high-intensity focus that phrase usually implies—is both the beginning and the end of the story.

We begin to see some of the challenges officers face as servants of the Nation. First, what if Army officers do not like the missions the Army receives? If World War II showed some in the Army the kind of war they would like to fight, the Vietnam war showed them the kind of war they wanted to avoid.[11] In November 1984, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger set out certain criteria for the use of force, criteria that were attractive to many in uniform. His speech became a touchstone in this debate.[12] Weinberger's requirements included the following:

- That vital interests be at stake.
- That forces be committed wholeheartedly with the intent to win.
- That objectives be clear.
- That public support be present.

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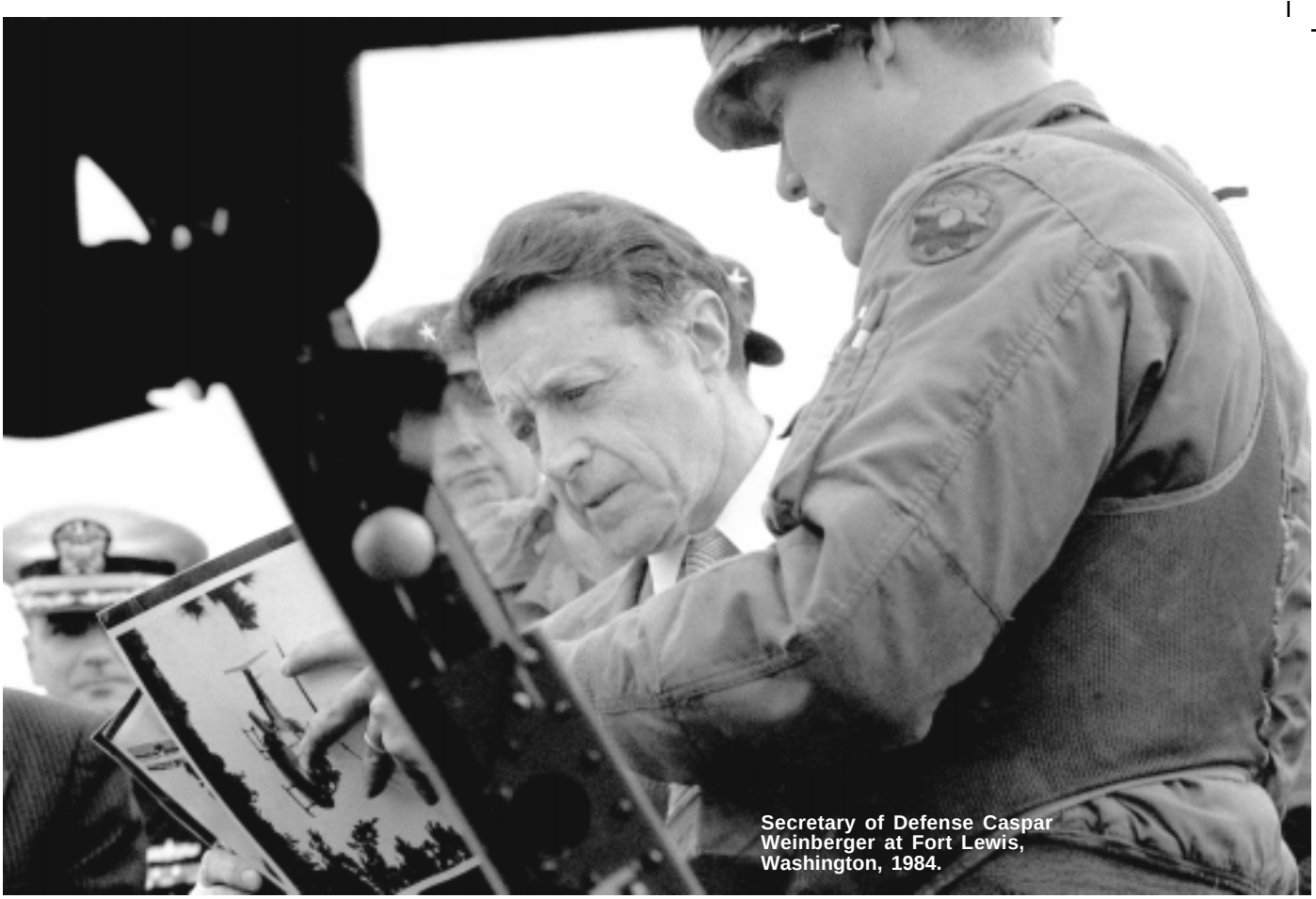

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger at Fort Lewis, Washington, 1984.

***The Weinberger doctrine suggested to military leaders that force would only be used under conditions more favorable than conditions present during the Vietnam conflict. . . . Colin Powell supplemented the Weinberger doctrine with his own perspective on the use of force [which emphasized] "quick, decisive actions and prompt exits."***

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In the 1990s, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Colin Powell supplemented the Weinberger doctrine with his own perspective on the use of force. Although Powell disavowed a rigid checklist, his views on the benefits of overwhelming force were perceived by at least one observer to constitute a doctrine of their own, with an emphasis on "quick, decisive actions and prompt exits."[13]

A danger associated with simplistically embracing the Weinberger and Powell doctrines is that their premises undermine the status of officers as servants of the Nation. In effect, the doctrines suggest that the Army (as well as the other services) respond to the direction of political leaders only if certain preconditions are met. Undoubtedly, senior military officers need to give political leaders assessments of feasibility, costs, and risks associated with planned military operations. However, the ultimate decision to employ the services belongs to political rather than military figures. This perspective, of course, is perfectly in accordance with the Army's current capstone doctrinal Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations,* which highlights the Army's "Proud History of Full Spectrum Operations."[14]

A second potential challenge to the Army officer's identity as a servant of the Nation arises when policy decisions act against the interests of the Army as an institution. Examples of such choices include budget reductions, canceling weapons programs, and changes in force structure. How should Army officers respond? As with the use of force, officers would be negligent if they did not provide civilian leaders with assessments of the costs and risks associated with various policy choices. In addition, officers at the most senior level face the challenge of remaining loyal to their executive branch superiors while also responding to Congress' constitutionally mandated right to exercise oversight. However, this communication should take place behind closed doors as much as possible. When officers attempt to serve as shapers of public opinion, they step out of the role of servants of society and into some other capacity.[15]

General Creighton W. Abrams, Chief of Staff of the Army from 1972 to 1974, was a strong combat leader who set a good example as a servant of the

Nation. Abrams was a key architect of major reforms in the Army that helped the institution recover from Vietnam and win decisively in the Persian Gulf war. He was known also for avoiding the limelight and for the highest standards of loyalty to military and civilian superiors. Perhaps the highest praise Abrams received came from Lieutenant General Ralph Foster, Abrams' Secretary of the General Staff, who said, "He had a deep loyalty. . . . He put the Army first in his life because it was the thing that he had to do, but what he [actually] put first was the country."[16]

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## A Professional

In addition to being a servant of the Nation, an Army officer is also the practitioner of a profession. What does this mean? Certainly the word "professional" has different meanings in different contexts. When discussing athletes, for example, the term "professional" is contrasted with the term "amateur" and means little more than that the athlete is paid for his or her performances. In the Army we might describe someone's behavior as "professional" or "unprofessional" according to whether or not an individual controls his temper or his vocabulary. A third use of the term "professional" is associated with variations in social status. For example, one can contrast a profession with a mere craft or mere occupation. In other words, claims to professional status might be nothing more than claims to greater prestige.

None of these uses of the term really illuminates what it means to an individual Army officer to be a practitioner of a profession. Fortunately, a recent project on the future of the Army profession has suggested a useful way of thinking about the issue.[17] The authors of the project took sociologist Andrew Abbott's *The System of Professions*, as a starting point.[18] Abbott defines professions as "exclusive occupational groups" that apply "somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases."[19] The tasks that professions perform are "human problems amenable to expert service."[20] The relatively exclusive group we are discussing is the Army's officer corps, and the human problem Army officers address with expert service is military security, particularly as it pertains to land-based warfare. Abbott's definition is helpful because it clarifies just what it is about being an Army officer that makes one a professional while leaving behind much of the baggage that can be associated with that term. However, to be fully useful, Abbott's formulation requires further development.

One important question that we must answer relates to the nature of the Army officer's special expertise. In a 1957 discussion of the officers of the U.S. Armed Forces, Samuel P. Huntington cited Harold Lasswell's phrase "the management of violence" and argued that it summed up the special expertise of professional military officers.[21] Huntington argued that "the direction, operation, and control of a human organization whose primary function is the application of violence is the peculiar skill of the officer."[22] This is helpful, but it needs further refinement. The Army's leadership doctrine is a useful place to begin.

Field Manual 22-100, *Army Leadership*, argues that the "Know" component of the Army's "Be, Know, Do" leadership framework tells the members of the Army that they must develop four skills: "You must develop **interpersonal skills,** knowledge of your people and how to work with them. You must have **conceptual skills,** the ability to understand and apply the doctrine and other ideas required to do your job. You must learn **technical skills,** how to use your equipment. Finally, warrior leaders must develop **tactical skills,** the ability to make the right decisions concerning employment of units in combat" [emphasis in original].[23]

Army leadership doctrine also recognizes that mastery of these skills requires different specific competencies at different levels of responsibility. These requirements are cumulative. As military officers become more senior and develop the competencies they will need at the organizational and strategic levels of leadership, they must retain the skills of direct leaders.

Despite the usefulness of the Army's leadership doctrine, difficult questions remain. FM 22-100 is written for all members of the Army—officer and enlisted, civilian and military. Because it does not distinguish between the roles of these different Army members, FM 22-100 leaves several questions unanswered. For example, is there required of the Army's commissioned officers a unique professional expertise that is distinct from that required of the Army's noncommissioned officers or civilians? Answering "yes" is easier than drawing the boundary lines. What are the implications for the content of the Army officer's expertise that stem from increased

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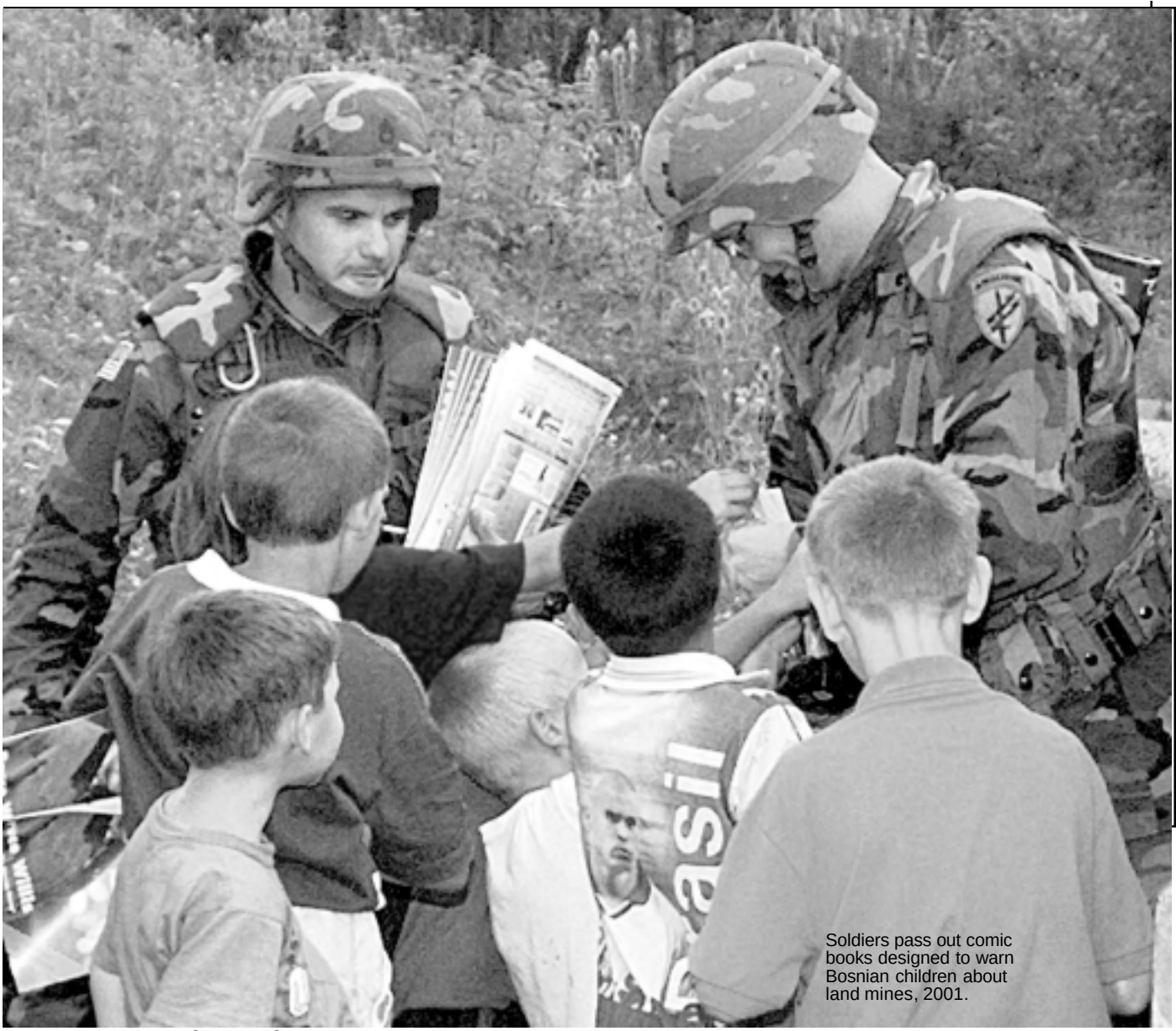

Soldiers pass out comic books designed to warn Bosnian children about land mines, 2001.

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specialization under the current officer personnel management system? Is there still a core expertise common to all officer specialties? These are difficult issues that the Army's officer corps will probably wrestle with for years to come.

Even after the content of Army officers' expertise is fully articulated, it should be recognized that for Army officers to remain effective the borders of this expertise will have to change over time. Gaining additional perspective on this issue is possible by looking at the work of others who have thought deeply about ground combat. For example, some of what Clausewitz says about military expertise is still relevant today. However, a fully adequate formulation for officers operating in the current environment would need to include requirements that did not exist in Clausewitz's time.

One issue on which Clausewitz's insights are enduring is the relationship between the use of force and politics. Clausewitz is famous for recognizing that war is a subordinate phenomenon whose logic is provided by political ends. Part of the particular expertise of Army officers is an understanding of this relationship and an ability to support the achievement of political aims with military means. The Army has recognized this principle in its leadership and operational manuals, requiring strategic leaders and commanders to appreciate the relationship between political ends and military means.[24] Even on this issue, however, the changing nature of warfare makes it

useful to reconsider the level at which this understanding is important. In today's stability and support operations where small unit actions can have strategic impact, even officers operating at the small unit level need to appreciate the subordination of the use of force to political purposes.

Another area of continuity relates to the skills that officers bring to bear in combat. While Clausewitz holds that the logic of war comes from politics, he also argues that war has its own unique grammar.[25] The military officer must understand the grammar of war, including the nature of military forces, tactics, and strategy, with a focus on the central task of combat.[26] Clausewitz also recognizes the special nature of the conditions under which officers apply their knowledge. He portrays war as an environment ruled by physical exertion, uncertainty, and fear, in which friction and a determined enemy work to thwart success. According to Clausewitz, an expert operating in this realm must have both theoretical knowledge and experience, and these attributes must be underpinned by strong character.[27] Clausewitz's argument reaffirms the Army's current emphasis on conceptual, technical, and tactical skills and the need to be able to bring them to bear under the most challenging conditions.

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While Clausewitz's insights provide useful perspective, his conception of military expertise is in many ways now incomplete. Current Army doctrine is much stronger than Clausewitz's work on the topic of interpersonal skills and their worth in enabling effective leadership. Clausewitz discusses the importance of effective leadership to success in war, but he emphasizes the leader's individual knowledge and ability rather than the leader's ability to effectively interact with others. In addition, today's Army officer must be prepared to go to war with the Army's sister services as part of a joint team. This is an aspect of needed expertise Clausewitz does not address. These points illustrate that the special expertise of the Army officer will be dynamic, and the profession will have to adapt along with changes in technology, society, national security strategy, and the international environment. Officers need to draw on operational experiences, the professional education system, and self-directed efforts to enhance their expertise and keep themselves up to date.

In addition to Abbott's mention of special expertise, another important aspect of his definition is the argument that a profession engages in the reasoned application of abstract knowledge to particular cases. Some observers have argued that the Army's professionalism has been threatened recently by greater bureaucratization, with one indicator being the increasingly rote application of formulaic solutions to particular problems.[28] One challenge to today's Army officers is not only to know the "approved" doctrinal solution, but to understand why that solution does or does not make sense and the conditions under which it might change. In 1984, Colonel Huba Wass de Czege wrote that "*the fundamental key to controlling and integrating change effectively is to raise the level of the knowledge and practice of the science and art of war in our Army*" [emphasis in original].[29] The challenge implied in this remark is a call to Army officers to act as professional custodians of a particular and dynamic body of expert knowledge and to take part in knowledge development as well as knowledge application.

The nature of the expert knowledge of the professional Army officer has an additional implication. As stated in FM 22-100, the Army is and must continue to be a values-based institution. The seven core values are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.[30] At the institutional level, these values constitute a professional ethic. Of course values also operate at an individual level; officers bring to their service their own sets of values.

The Army's professional ethic is strongest when two conditions are present: first, when the actual environment in the Army reflects the Army's professed values and, second, when individual values and the Army's values are compatible. When these two conditions are not present, the professional ethic is weakened.[31] Because of the importance of the Army's professional military ethic to effectiveness, the Army's officer corps must work to maintain its strength.

The Army's professional ethic is related to the officer's expert knowledge in at least three ways. First, armies can be dangerous to the societies they are created to serve. Therefore, the Army officer's expertise must be accompanied by values so the officer's military skills are only used in the service of legitimate authority. Second, and this has been more obvious at some times during the Nation's his-

tory than at other times, Army officers perform a vital service to the country by participating with the other armed services in the Nation's defense. This function requires dedication, because failure is not an option, and selflessness, because service members might have to put their lives at risk. The determinants of behavior when it matters most are values and trust in the Army's leaders. Finally, the Army officer's expertise must be governed by the Army's values because Army leaders are responsible for the lives and welfare of their soldiers.

In all these areas, the officer's role as a servant of the Nation and the officer's role as a practitioner of a profession merge. Army officers apply their expert knowledge only when called to do so by legitimate authorities, in protection of the country's interests and values, and with a heavy sense of responsibility for the sons and daughters of U.S. citizens.

Because of the nature of the military function, the values that are necessary in a military context do not exactly mirror the values of the society from which the Army stems. One aspect of the greatness of American society is the room it provides for individual expression, achievement, and growth. In contrast, while the individual is still valued in a military context, military-effectiveness requires greater emphasis on the welfare of the group and the subordination of self. Army officers must articulate these differences and defend them if necessary. The Army officer corps must also serve as the custodian of the Army's professional ethic and police its own ranks accordingly.

In sum, the Army officer is a professional able to apply a body of expert knowledge about warfare to particular scenarios. The necessary knowledge is gained through both theoretical study and practical experience and evolves over time. In addition, the officer's profession is intrinsically values-based. The professional uses his or her expert knowledge to protect the values and interests of the American people as defined by their political representatives. In so doing, the officer accepts the weighty responsibility for the welfare of the soldiers under his or her command.

When the officer takes the oath of commissioning, he or she accepts the obligation to be a servant to the Nation and to become an expert member of a challenging profession. Along with the two other perspectives on officership—the officer as a leader of character and the officer as a warfighter—these roles define what it means to serve as a commissioned leader in the U.S. Army. An officer corps that embraces the challenges of each of these roles will be able to lead the Army effectively and confidently through the 21st Century. ***MR***

## NOTES

1. Thomas E. White and Eric K. Shinseki, "Joint Statement on the Fiscal Year 2002 Army Budget," (statement before the Subcommittee on Defense of the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, 107th Congress, First Session, Washington, DC, 13 June 2001), 1.
2. Gayle L. Watkins and Randi C. Cohen, "In Their Own Words: Army Officers Discuss Their Profession," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, eds. Don M. Snider, Gayle L. Watkins, and Lloyd J. Matthews (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 94.
3. National Archives and Records Administration, *A More Perfect Union: The Creation of the United States Constitution* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 1986), 21.
4. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War,* trans. and eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 89.
5. Carl Builder, *The Masks of War* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 3.
6. Ibid., 20.
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8. Ibid., 20.
9. Ibid., 38.
10. Ibid.
11. William J. Taylor, Jr., and David H. Petraeus, "The Legacy of Vietnam for the U.S. Military," in *Democracy, Strategy, and Vietnam: Assessing the Impact of the War on American Policymaking,* eds. George K. Osborn et al. (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), 250.
12. Caspar Weinberger, (remarks to the National Press Club, 28 November 1984), *Defense* 85 (January 1985): 10.
13. Charles A. Stevenson, "The Evolving Clinton Doctrine on the Use of Force," *Armed Forces and Society* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 517.
14. U.S. Department of the Army (DA), Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 14 June 2001), 1-3.
15. For a more extensive discussion of the norms that ought to guide the relationship between senior military officers and political leaders in a democracy, *see* Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, "Infusing Civil-Military Relations Norms in the Officer Corps," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, eds. Don M. Snyder, Gayle L. Watkins, and Lloyd J. Matthews (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 245-70.
16. Ralph Foster, (oral history interview with LTC Tom Lightner and LTC Steve Glick, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1976), 40.
17. For findings from this project, *see* Snider Watkins, and Matthews (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2002).
18. Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
19. Ibid., 8.
20. Ibid., 35.
21. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 11.
22. Ibid.
23. FM 22-100, *Leadership* (Washington, DC: GPO, 31 August 1999), 1-7.
24. FM 3-0 says, "Commanders need to appreciate political ends and understand how the military conditions they achieve contribute to them" (pp. 4-12). Similarly, FM 22-100 says that the conceptual skills of strategic leaders must include an appreciation of the current national security strategy. The need to shape the Army so that the Army is able to support the objectives of the political leadership is not explicitly stated but seems to be implied (pp. 7-7 through 7-8).
25. Clausewitz, 605.
26. Ibid., 95.
27. Ibid., 141, 100.
28. Snider and Watkins, "The Future of Army Professionalism: A Need for Renewal and Redefinition," *Parameters* (Autumn 2000): 18.
29. Huba Wass de Czege, "How to Change an Army," *Military Review* (November 1984): 38.
30. FM 22-100, 2-2.
31. For a recent example of this difficulty, *see* "The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study: Report to the Army," OS-8. This report found that "Army Culture is out of balance. There is friction between Army beliefs and practices." It also found that the Army's service ethic was not well understood and not "adequately reinforced throughout an officer's career." Report accessed on-line 14 October 2002, at <www.virtualarmory.com/youcannet/ycn6/resources/osm/Army_Officer_Study.pdf>.

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